

Iowa Outdoors

Iowa Department of Natural Resources
www.iowadnr.com

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1. Bird Banding, Trumpeters – by Joe Wilkinson [please hold this story until Thursday]
2. Iowa Timber Prices Climb
3. Ice Fishing Report

BIRD BANDING, TRUMPETERS

Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Hands dwarfing the tangled ball of feathers, Rob Bradley worked to separate bird from net. The downy woodpecker struggled occasionally. Otherwise, it held quiet as Bradley worked it free. Nearby, two volunteers extricated a couple others caught in the small mesh of the eight-by-20 foot net.

Inside, the crowd had grown from 20 to 30, as Cub Scouts, parents, senior citizens and others pushed closer. Another 15 or 20 people would take their places through the morning. They watched as Bradley banded the birds, before releasing them back into the wooded fringe at Wickiup Hill Conservation Center, in Linn County. “We want to find out where they come from; where they go and how long they live,” explained Bradley. “There are lots of different banders throughout the nation. Whole groups have stations and band year round; to see whether specific populations are increasing or decreasing.”

A bird banding session takes winter bird watching to a new level. The birds are still attracted to various feeders. A net placed alongside, though, interrupts the frequent swoops down to the suet feeder, the sunflower or nyjer seed tubes or to the scattered seed on the ground. Besides the downies, the net snared several goldfinches, juncos, chickadees and a larger hairy woodpecker; perhaps the catch of the day.

“Look how much bigger it is than the downy,” offered Bradley, holding them softly but firmly in his hands. By the end of the session, the crowd knew that males of the two species have telltale red patches on the back of their heads. They saw that goldfinches are actually more green-gray in the winter. They learned how eye color and feather pattern distinguish a young of the year bird from an adult.

And on this day, they saw first-hand that downy woodpeckers are a pretty common winter inhabitant near Iowa woodlands. Over three-quarters of the birds captured were the small (one ounce) black and white downies. Several already wore the tiny aluminum bands. “Today, we had about 40 percent recaptures,” noted Bradley. “Some were banded in November of last year; others a year and a half ago. That’s because (downies) stay in the same area all year long.” They are there for the steady suet supply. Near the net, a couple cardinals, a titmouse, several nuthatches and other species raided seed feeders; bolted into place, just out of range.

“These bands are kind of like license plates,” Bradley explained. “Send in the number or band to the National Bird Laboratory in Maryland and they send you a certificate. Bradley circulated a few, which showed what kind of bird it was, where and when it was banded and any other information that could be established. Having banded more than 30,000 birds in the last 10 years, he has received 35 returns. That is in addition to hundreds of ‘local’ recaptures like we saw.

Banders themselves are as rare as some of the birds they seek. Licenses are granted to those who can prove their area or project has a good reason for birds to be banded, and who are shown capable of it. It took Bradley 15 years to be approved.

They also generate a ton of useful information. “We learned a lot about kestrels, especially,” notes Bruce Ehresman, wildlife diversity biologist with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. “Adult females would come back to the same nest box for four years in a row, sometimes five or six. Yet, young birds almost never returned. That seems to indicate heavy mortality.” Time constraints prevent looking more deeply at all the data. “There’s a lot of decent information,” concedes Ehresman. “There just isn’t enough time.”

Home Sweet Home (On Ice) for Trumpeters

Standing out among hundreds of Canada geese, more than a dozen trumpeter swans added a touch of wildlife elegance as we watched. Swan caretaker Shirley Stahl called them as she scattered a bucket of shelled corn on the bank of this 8-acre pond. “They usually come up when I call em, if they’re not up here waiting on us. This new fence and strangers (me) have them more cautious. They don’t take to strangers.”

A few yards out, a bubbler kept the water agitated, and open, through the winter. That attracts the waterfowl; geese and swans alike. During the day, they feed in the fields. At night and as they loaf during the day, they return to the safety of the water. A fence around the feeding site deters predators, as well as raccoons and others who wouldn’t mind a free meal. The DNR, through its swan restoration program, supplies the feed and materials. Volunteers like Stahl and her father, Elmer, provide the labor; feeding the birds, making minor repairs and monitoring the winter swans.

“We have a half dozen winter sites scattered across Iowa now,” notes DNR wetlands biologist Ron Andrews. “It gives people an opportunity to see these birds in the wintertime.” We were five miles south of Webster City, where three dozen trumpeters are wintering. Two are non-flying ‘resident’ birds; incapable of flight. They raise young each year, which do grow up wild. The rest are free flying swans. Some carry neck or wing bands, but are wild birds. Most hail from Minnesota and Wisconsin, considering central Iowa ‘south’ as they migrate. Another two dozen swans winter near Atlantic. Scattered birds dot other winter swan havens.

Introduced a decade ago in Iowa, trumpeters still attract fans; watching from road shoulders or anywhere else they can get a look at North America’s largest waterfowl. “I like calling them ‘charismatic megafauna’. They’re beautiful to see in the sky or on the water,” admits Andrews. “Their call sounds like French horns. People really flock to see these birds when they have the opportunity.”

Last summer in Iowa, there were 13 documented wild nesting pairs. Andrews expects that number to keep growing, as young Iowa-raised wild swans mature and look for territories of their own.

Rare Grouse Featured in Kent Park Program

Nationally known wildlife photographer Roger Hill will present his program on the Sharptail Grouse and the Greater Prairie Chicken, Sunday, February 8 at 4 p.m. at the Johnson County Conservation Education Center in F.W. Kent Park. Hill has been photographing prairie chickens in Ringgold County for the past 13 years and the rare Sharptail Grouse in Woodbury County for the past four years. His photographs have appeared on the covers of more than 20 different magazines as well as book covers and calendars. Recently, Roger was honored as the National Pheasants Forever Photographer of the Year.

For more information, contact the Conservation Department at 645-2315.

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IOWA TIMBER PRICES CLIMB

Standing timber prices have risen substantially in Iowa over the last 10 years. The current prices for standing upland mixed oak-hickory are ranging from \$320 to \$400 dollars per thousand board feet. Prices for bottomland silver maple are ranging from \$400 to \$450 dollars per thousand board feet.

“Since 1993 we have seen over a fifty percent price increase in mixed oak-hickory upland timber and a three to four hundred percent increase in the price of silver

maple,” said Paul Tauke, forestry supervisor with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

Tauke cautions that prices can vary dramatically based upon the quality and species composition within individual forest stands. “The best way to determine a range of values for your timber is to work with your DNR forester or a private consulting forester,” he said.

Although it is sometimes difficult for landowners to determine the timber value and volume in their woodland stand, with good forest management and planning landowners can improve both their financial and economic yield. For example, unmanaged Iowa woodlands may yield between 1,000 to 3,000 board-feet per acre or between \$320 and \$1,350 per acre. With proper management an acre of Iowa woodland may yield 5,000 to 15,000 board-feet per acre or \$1,600 to \$6,750 per acre.

But Tauke again cautions that individual stands may vary greatly. “The bottom line is that management will allow you to grow bigger and better quality trees much quicker than can be done with no management.” Tauke said the financial returns on an acre of timber will be even larger if the timber quality is improved to a veneer or high end sawlog level, and species composition is manipulated to favor higher quality hardwoods such as red oak, white oak, black cherry, hard maple, silver maple and black walnut, where suitable.

He also said that forest management can integrate timber production into other woodland owner management objectives such as wildlife habitat, water quality, and overall forest ecosystem health in a manner that is sustainable in the short and long term.

Landowners interested in determining how they can improve their timber’s financial future or those interested in planting an existing site to trees to cash in on future timber markets can get more information by logging onto www.iowatreeplanting.com or by contacting DNR forestry supervisor Paul Tauke at 515/242-6898.

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IOWA FISHING REPORT

For the week of January 27, 2004

www.iowadnr.com

Ice conditions continue to vary greatly across the state.

Northwest

Spirit Lake (Dickinson): Caution: There is still some open water around the lake, so extreme caution is recommended if choosing to drive on the ice. Anglers are fishing for walleye way out from Marble Beach, and along Reeds Run on the east side, as well as on the north end by Crandalls Beach, Big Stoney and Mini-Wakan State Park. Anglers are using jigging raps, kastmasters and other lures tipped with minnows, minnow heads or perch eyes, when available. Perch fishing has been kind of slow, with some being caught on the north end at Crandalls Beach and Mini-Wakan State Park and north of Big Stoney Point using pilkees and jigs tipped with minnows and wigglers. Anglers are also catching perch off the North Grade using teardrops tipped with wax worms. Crappie action out from Angler's Bay Resort is still pretty good. Anglers are also catching some crappies at the North Grade along the weed lines using minnows. Bluegills are being caught at the North Grade along the weed lines on wax worms and smaller jigs.

West Okoboji (Dickinson): Caution: There is open water at the Gull Point area and at the north end of the lake. Anglers are still catching bluegill and crappie in Miller's Bay fishing in 10 to 12 feet of water. A few are also being caught in Smith's Bay, but try fishing a little closer to shore. Pocahontas Point is another area to try for bluegill. A few northern pike are being caught at Smith's, Miller's and Emerson bays using chubs. Yellow perch are being caught between Gull Point and Eagle Point at Spencer Beach in 10 to 12 feet of water.

Five Island (Palo Alto): Anglers are catching walleye at the north end of the third island late in the evening and into the night. Some crappies are being caught between the first island and the trestle.

Lake Pahoja (Lyon): Lots of smaller bluegills are being caught. A few channel catfish are being caught on small jigs tipped with a wax worm.

Dog Creek (O'Brien): Anglers are catching a few black crappies in the evening.

Brushy Creek (Webster): Caution: Large sections of the main lake have not frozen over. Ice conditions vary throughout the lake. Anglers are catching a few sunfish and crappies at the north boat ramp and behind Taylor Island.

Arrowhead Lake (Sac): Bluegill fishing is good throughout the lake. Anglers are catching 7 to 7-1/2 inch fish.

Black Hawk Lake (Sac): Caution: There is lots of open water at Black Hawk. Anglers are catching a few crappie and yellow bass.

Clear Lake (Cerro Gordo): Yellow bass fishing is good. Yellows are being caught around the Island and Billy's Reef. Use minnows and jigging spoons for the best action. Try different spots until locating fish. Walleye fishing is fair. Walleye in the 14 to 18-inch range and a few larger fish are being caught while fishing for yellow bass. Fish from sunset into the evening hours for the best chance at walleye.

Rice Lake (Winnebago/Worth): Yellow perch are hitting on minnows and small jigs. Many of the perch are small, so sorting is required. A few 2 to 5-pound northern pike are being caught while fishing for perch.

Silver Lake (Worth): Yellow perch fishing is fair. Use small minnows and jigs for bait. Sorting is required to get larger fish.

Lake Cornelia (Wright): Yellow perch fishing is fair. Fish with minnows nears the dredge cut on the north end of the lake.

For more information on fishing in northwest Iowa, call the regional office in Spirit Lake at (712) 336-1840.

Southwest

With recent warm weather anglers are reminded to use extreme caution when venturing onto lake or ponds.

Big Creek (Polk): Anglers report crappie fishing is good late during the day using minnows, and bluegill during the day using wax worms in the area near the spillway. Crappie fishing in the main part of the lake is fair, with the better areas in the south part of the lake towards the dam.

Lake Ahquabi (Warren): Bluegill and crappie fishing is slow to fair. Ice conditions are reported to be good.

Don Williams (Boone): Crappie fishing is good to excellent. A good area to try is along the eastern part of the lake in the afternoon. Some bluegills are reported, although slow.

Hickory Grove (Story): Bluegill fishing has picked up and anglers are reporting some fair to good fishing.

Lake Red Rock (Marion): Anglers report walleye fishing in the tailwater of the dam has picked up. Try twister tails and jigs.

Farm Ponds: Note: anglers need permission to fish on private ponds. Ice thickness varies from 3 to 8 inches. Fishing is good for bluegills and crappies on area ponds.

Viking (Montgomery): Ice thickness varies from 6 to 9 inches. Anglers are catching small bluegills. Better fishing is toward evening.

Greenfield (Adair): Ice thickness varies from 5 to 7 inches. There are 3 areas of open water: at end of fishing jetty north of boat ramp, boat ramp, and around northeast shoreline. Use caution and check ice thickness and conditions often, avoid areas near open water. Anglers were catching 6 to 8-inch bluegills.

Meadow (Adair): Fishing is very good for bluegills.

Mormon Trail (Adair): Ice thickness varies from 5 to 7 inches. Use caution and check ice thickness and conditions often. Anglers were catching 7 to 9-inch bluegills and sorting out of the 4 to 5 inch bluegills.

Willow Lake (Harrison): Ice is about 8 inches thick. Anglers are catching a few bluegills, with better fishing toward evening.

Farm Creek Lake (Montgomery): Ice thickness varies from 6 to 8 inches. Fishing is excellent for bluegills.

Anderson Area North Pond (Montgomery): There is 8 inches of ice. Fishing is good for bluegills in front of the dam.

DeSoto Bend (Harrison): Ice thickness varies from 3 to 8 inches. Anglers are catching crappies and bluegills around structure at the south end of the lake.

Prairie Rose (Shelby): Ice thickness varies from 3 to 7 inches. Anglers are catching catfish, small bluegill and crappies. The best place is around brush piles.

Three Mile (Union): Ice conditions have improved, but anglers are finding there could be thin ice around the pressure ridges out from the upper ramp. Fishing is good for bluegill and crappies in the upper end. Some walleyes are being caught all over the lake.

Twelve Mile (Union): Fishing is good for walleyes and crappies.
Green Valley (Union): Ice is thinner with marginal ice conditions.
Badger Creek (Madison): Fishing is real good for 7 to 8 inch bluegills.
Criss Cove (Madison) and the smaller county board areas are good for crappie and bluegill.
Icaria (Adams): Channel catfish is being caught through the ice.
Fogle (Ringgold): Good ice and good fishing for lots of bluegills.
Slip Bluff (Decatur), **Windmill** (Taylor) and **Wilson** (Taylor) lakes are all good for bluegill and crappie. Ice thickness varies from 5 to 8 inches.
Walnut Creek Marsh (Ringgold): Fishing is good for bluegill and some crappies.
Little River (Decatur): Fishing is good for bluegill and crappies.
For more information on fishing in southwest Iowa, contact the regional office in Lewis at (712) 769-2587.

Southeast

Mississippi River Pools 16 to 19: There is 5 to 6 inches of ice on most backwater areas of the Mississippi on Pools 16 – 19. Anglers are reporting fair to good fishing for bluegills and slow to fair fishing success for crappie in Big Timber and Bell's Pocket.

Lake Odessa (Louisa): Ice thickness varies from place to place. The trees in Sand Run are still producing some nice bluegills.

Lake Geode (Henry): Finally, some good ice (5 inches). Use caution near areas where the geese are keeping the lake open. Fishing is slow.

Lake Darling (Washington): Ice thickness is 6 inches. A few bluegills and crappies are being caught around the cedar trees in 13 to 15 feet of water in the middle of the lake.

Lake Belva Deer (Keokuk): There are some open water areas near the dam and the ice thickness is still highly variable. Use extreme caution. A few bluegills are being caught in 15 to 20 feet of water on small jigs.

Lake Rathbun (Appanoose): Crappies have been biting on minnows and small jigs fished around underwater habitat such as brush piles or pallet structures. Honey Creek and Buck Creek coves have been the most productive areas.

Lake Wapello (Davis): Ice conditions remain extremely variable with ice thickness ranging from 2 to 6 inches. There is an open water area to the east of the beach. Use caution if venturing onto the ice and test for thickness regularly.

Lake Miami (Monroe): Crappies have been hitting on minnows and bluegills have been biting on jigs tipped with a wax worm. Early mornings and late evenings have been the best fishing times.

Lake Sugema (Van Buren): Bluegills have been hitting on jigs tipped with a wax worm. Crappies have been biting on minnows. Fishing has also been good at the Tug Fork ponds above Lake Sugema.

Lake Macbride (Johnson): Anglers should be aware of open water areas near the dam and the Causeway Bridge area on the south arm. Fishing has been fair in the early morning and just before and after dark for crappies around brush piles. Some decent sized bluegills have been caught. Sorting required for sizeable fish.

Pleasant Creek (Linn): Fishing has been fair to slow for bluegills, crappie, and perch around the dam and roadbed on the west end.

Coralville Reservoir (Johnson): Watch out for poor ice around Mehaffey Bridge. Some anglers have been catching a few crappies throughout the reservoir, around the rock walls and brush piles. Fishing has been slow.

Hannen Lake (Benton): Bluegill and crappie fishing has been fair to slow during the morning and evening hours using jigs tipped with wax worms. Anglers are reminded that minnow usage is prohibited. An ice fishing tournament is set for Jan. 31, from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Hannen Lake. Contact the Benton County Conservation Board for more information, 319-454-6382.

Lake Iowa (Iowa): Fishing has been fair for bluegills and crappies around brush piles in the late afternoon and evening on jigs tipped with wax worms.

Diamond Lake (Poweshiek): Fishing has been slow to fair. A few crappie and bluegill have been caught in late afternoon on jigs tipped with wax worms fished around brush piles. Anglers are reminded that minnow usage is prohibited. An ice fishing tournament is set for Jan. 31 from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. at Diamond Lake. Contact the Poweshiek County Conservation Board for more information, 641-623-3191.

Washington and Keokuk County Ponds: Ice thickness varies from 5 to 6 inches. The best hours to fish seem to be the hours around sunset. Wax worms on teardrop jigs fished about one to two feet off the bottom are catching fish.

Farm Ponds: Fishing has been fair for bluegills on jigs tipped with wax worms.

For more information on fishing in southeast Iowa, call the regional office in Brighton at (319) 694-2430.

Northeast

Mississippi River Pools 9 to 15: Crappies are being caught around the weed beds in **Bussey Lake**, Pool 10. Bass are being caught on tip-ups. **Methodist Lake** in Pool 10 has been accessible with 5 inches of ice on **Wyalusing Slough** and 8 inches on the lake. Fishing on the River has slowed however there are now good ice conditions. A few fish are being caught in **Kehough** and **Fishtrap** in Pool 12. In Pool 13, **Browns Lake** has good and bad days. The lower end of Browns seems to be producing the best catches, but most people are reporting small fish. At **Spring Lake**, a few crappies and bluegill are being caught. **Michelsons**, early morning and late afternoon seem to be fair for bluegill. **Middle** and **Lower Sabula** lakes have slowed but anglers are still catching bluegill, crappie and yellow perch (Middle Lake). In Pool 14, **Rock Creek** has slowed as well, but the early bite still seems to be the best for crappie.

Volga Lake (Fayette): Fishing is excellent for 6 to 7-inch bluegill with occasional crappie or perch. Most people are fishing near the bottom in deeper water. Morning and evening are a little better.

Meyer Lake (Winneshiek): Lots of 6 to 7-inch bluegills being taken on teardrops with wax worms.

For information on fishing in northeast Iowa, call the regional office in Manchester at (563) 927-3276.

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